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The Dedication of Tragedies to Women, 1659-1689

Much has been written over the last forty years on the increasingly significant place occupied by women as the seventeenth century progressed, and the influence some came to exert, whether as members of salon society or in religious orders¹. This article highlights a previously neglected illustration of this: the dedication of tragedies to women across a thirty-year period from 1659 to 1689. These are analysed for their identification of women of importance, the qualities attributed to them, and the strategies employed to diversify a necessarily conventional and repetitive form.² Of the works considered, the best known are probably Racine's *Andromaque* and (by reputation at least) Pradon's *Phèdre et Hippolyte*; the majority have, however, either remained in or returned to oblivion. It is hoped, therefore, that this article will also help widen our understanding of these 'glory days' of French classical tragedy.

My chosen dates have, in fact, more to do with repertory than publishing. In 1659, the actor La Grange began his *Registre*, recording the activity of the companies to which he belonged: Molière's troupe, the Hôtel Guénégaud company and finally the Comédie-Française; and 1689 was when the latter company quit the Hôtel Guénégaud to move to new premises³. Working on the

¹ See, for example, Carolyn Lougee. *Le Paradis des femmes: Women, Salons and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976; Geneviève Reynes. *Couvents de femmes: la vie des religieuses contemplatives dans la France des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Paris: Fayard, 1987; Elizabeth Rapley. *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*. Montreal: McGill, 1990; Myriam Maître. *Les Précieuses: naissance des femmes de lettres au XVIIe siècle*. Paris: H. Champion, 1999; Roger Duchêne. *Les Précieuses ou comment l'esprit vint aux femmes*. Paris: Fayard, 2001; Faith E. Beasley. *Salons, History and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*. Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

² It would potentially be interesting to compare the content of these with dedications to men, but that falls outside the scope of the present study.

³ When Molière died in 1673, his Palais-Royal theatre was allocated to Lully for the production of opera. The remaining members of his troupe moved to the Hôtel Guénégaud, where they were joined by actors from the Marais Then, in 1680, actors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne were ordered to move to the Hôtel Guénégaud, which became the first home of the Comédie-Française. See Jan Clarke. *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673-1680). Volume One: Founding, Design and Production*. Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1998. Even

repertoires of these companies and their rivals, I was struck by the frequency with which I encountered dedications to women and of tragedies in particular. The question of how common a phenomenon this was can be addressed by statistical evidence. In the first two decades of my period, of those tragedies bearing dedications, roughly a third were dedicated to women (32% in 1660-69 and 27% in 1670-79)⁴. In the final decade, however, this percentage rose dramatically to 67%⁵, which would seem to indicate an increased recognition of the influence of certain women during these years.

The dedications function in various ways according to the nature of the play. Frequently, the author is asking the dedicatee to protect his work, thereby casting her in a position of power⁶. Plays that had been performed were normally only published once their first run had ceased⁷. Protection is, therefore, sometimes sought to compensate for an adverse public reaction. In such cases, the dedicatee

though my timeframe relates to theatrical activity, the dates given are those of publication, since a number of plays in my corpus were not intended to be performed.

⁴ Similarly, in 1659, 29% of those plays bearing dedications were dedicated to women.

⁵ My corpus is based on information taken from Henry Carrington Lancaster. *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*. 9 vols, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1929-1942. But although I have been as thorough as possible, this essay cannot claim to be exhaustive, particularly since I was unable to find one play (*Sainte Cécile couronné* by Jean-François de Nisme), and the version of Millotet's *Chariot de triomphe* I was able to access (Hugues Millotet. *Chariot de triomphe tiré par deux aigles de la glorieuse, noble et illustre bergere, Ste Reine d'Alise, vierge et martyre*. Autun: Blaise Simonnot, 1664, BnF, Arts du spectacle, 8-RF-6542) did not contain a dedication. It should also be noted that this phenomenon is not unique to this period – I have identified over twenty similar tragedies published between 1637 and 1658 that could be included in a longer study. A comparison with dedications to comedy might also be fruitful, as well as with dedications to men.

⁶ Inevitably, the majority of works in all genres given in this period were by men. Of the three tragedies by women, *Nitétis* by Mlle Desjardins (Mme de Villedieu) (1664) was dedicated to the duc de Saint Aignan; *Genséric* by Mme Deshoulières (1680) has no dedication; and *Laodamie* by Catherine Bernard (1689) was not published until 1735. However, in 1702, Marie-Anne Barbier dedicated her *Arie et Pétus* to the duchesse de Bouillon (of whom more later) (Marie-Anne Barbier. *Arie et Pétus*. Paris: M. Brunet, 1702). At first glance, the content of this dedication does not differ much from others examined here, but a development of this topic might include a comparison of dedications to women by female authors with those of their male counterparts.

⁷ After publication plays were open to be performed by any company. This mutually agreed practice allowed companies to capitalize on their investment thanks to a period of exclusivity.

is praised for her intelligence and enlightenment — she can judge a work's true value as distinct from unfavourable or indifferent critics and audiences. The fact that she has heard the work read (presumably in a salon setting) or attended a performance is often emphasised: the approval she is deemed to have expressed has emboldened the author to offer her his play. And of course, in so doing, he is simultaneously bragging about the excellence of his connections.

Where the plays have not been performed, the aims are different. Many such works are religious (usually treatments of the lives of female saints), written by priests and dedicated to female religious figures or women known for their piety. In such cases, either the work's instructive aspects or the similarities between the saint and the dedicatee are emphasised. For example, a work that falls just outside our timeframe is Le Ville's *Cynosure de l'ame* (1658)⁸, which dramatizes the lives of three female saints, Elizabeth, Dorothy and Ursula, and is dedicated to Dorothee de Croy⁹. As Lancaster puts it, Le Ville's three heroines « represented three stages in the life of the duchesse: those of virgin (Dorotée), of childless wife (Ursule), and of widow (Elisabeth) », adding that the author « is not primarily a dramatist but a pious versifier, interested in praising saintly and childless women to the Duchess of Croy »¹⁰.

As previously noted, the dedication is a highly stylised, not to say rigid form, allowing for little variation. Authors are consequently obliged to invent conceits to display originality and attract the dedicatee's attention (and ideally patronage). Above all, the identities of the dedicatees, the descriptions of them and the reasons given for their selection provide an interesting perspective on the place occupied by certain women in the society of the time and the scope of their influence.

⁸ Nicolas de Le Ville. *La Cynosure de l'âme ou poésie morale*. Lovain: André Bouvet, 1658.

⁹ Dorothee de Croy (1585-1661) was the second wife of Charles II, duc d'Aerchot, duc de Croy, whom she married in 1605.

¹⁰ Lancaster. *History*, III, 411, 427.

Moreover, the praise bestowed illustrates those qualities that were most esteemed, some of which might surprise us.

I will first consider religious plays not intended for performance. In his dedication of *Dipne, infante d'Irlande* (1668) to Marie-Éléonore de Rohan, abbess of Malnoue, François d'Aure tackles head-on the problem of presenting a woman in religious orders with an example of an art form he believes she must find « odieux »¹¹. He notes that in Classical times, virgins were allowed to attend the Olympic games whereas married women were not, and esteems that the Emperor Augustus mistreated vestals by permitting them to attend spectacles that were « lascives & impures ». In contrast, he recommends his own work as a « spectacle sacré d'un Theatre Chrétien » that the abbess can enjoy in the safety of her cell. He flatters his dedicatee by emphasising the qualities she shares with its subject, « une Princesse qui abhorre le monde, qui méprise la Cour, qui fuit tres-volontairement & courageusement tous les attraits mondains d'un Sang illustre, d'une haute naissance, d'une condition relevée », and who chose to turn her back on marriage to devote herself to the « pur Epoux des Vierges ». He also claims to have focused his thoughts on the abbess when trying to envisage the saint.

D'Aure followed *Dipne* with a play on the life of Genevieve of Brabant, dedicated to the duchesse de Roannez¹². According to the author, the duchesse and his subject had both married men named Sifroy who were ardent in their

¹¹ François d'Aure. *Dipne, infante d'Irlande*. Montargis: Jean-Baptiste Bottier, 1668. Marie-Éléonore was the daughter of Hercule de Rohan-Guéméné, duc de Montbazou, and his second wife, Marie de Bretagne. She was first abbess of La Trinité de Caen and then of Malnoue. She died aged fifty-three in 1682 (Louis-Gabriel Michaud. *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*. 2nd éd, 45 vols, Paris: A. Thoinier Desplaces, 1843, XXXVI, 334-35).

¹² François d'Aure. *Geneviève, ou l'innocence reconnue*. Montargis: Jean-Baptiste Bottier, 1670. Charlotte Gouffier (1633-83) was the sister of Arthus Gouffier, duc de Roannez. She and her brother were both close to Pascal, with whom Charlotte conducted a correspondence. She entered Port-Royal but emerged to marry the duc de la Feuillade (1667), who purchased from her the title of duc de Roannez that Arthus had ceded to his sister (Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*. Paris: Hachette, 1873-1886, III, 315-19).

defence of the Catholic faith¹³, and he claims to see similarities in the two relationships: « J'ay reconnu au parfait mariage de cette Sainte Dame, l'admirable ménage du vôtre ». But no virtuous woman could willingly have chosen marriage, and so the duchesse is praised for having « fit genereusement violenter [ses] propres volontez » in submitting to the authority of her parents¹⁴. Indeed, taking Saint Elizabeth of Hungary as his example, d'Aure asserts that such married queens and princesses are admitted to a special category of sainthood. The crux of Genevieve's story is that she was wrongly accused of adultery. However, according to d'Aure, there is no possibility of the duchesse suffering a similar fate, since even at court she only appeared with « l'Honneur pour écuyer, la Vertu pour compagne, & la Pieté pour confidente ». Indeed, chastity seems to have run in her family, since her mother is said to have led an exemplary life in the chastity of a long widowhood, her brother made the « précieux choix de la chasteté d'un Celibat parfait & accompli », two of her sisters were « relevees dans l'eminente chasteté de la Virginité regulierement professée », and the duchesse herself enjoyed « une Chasteté conjugale » (although she did succeed in providing her husband with an heir in 1673). Finally, d'Aure takes another sideswipe at contemporary theatre, saying he has taken the liberty of presenting his work to her « sur la croyance que vous en pourrez recevoir quelque petit divertissement conforme à vostre naturel, espuré des especes qui peuvent s'imprimer aux lascives representations du Theatre moderne ».

In 1671, Alexandre Le Grand dedicated his *Sainte Reine* to the Queen, Maria Theresa¹⁵, and exploited to the full the possibilities offered by the relationship of

¹³ This is a curious claim, since the duc's full name was, in fact, François d'Aubusson.

¹⁴ According to Boislisle, Charlotte first entered Port-Royal to avoid an unwanted marriage (Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*, III, 318).

¹⁵ Alexandre Le Grand. *Le Triomphe de l'amour divin de Sainte Reine vierge et martyre* Paris: Ch. Gorrent et J. Gobert, 1671. Maria Theresa, Infanta of Spain (1638-83), had married Louis XIV in 1660.

the saint's name and his dedicatee's position. His praise of the Queen is unstinting; for example he claims to be merely doing his duty in placing:

... une si sainte Reine entre les mains d'une Reine, non seulement la plus illustre, la plus grande, la plus puissante, la plus glorieuse, mais aussi la plus pieuse, la plus devote, & en un mot la plus accomplie en toutes sortes de vertus qui soit dans l'Univers.

Again, the similarities between the dedicatee and the subject are highlighted, and the Queen is told she will recognise the saint's perfections « comme dans un miroir ». An interesting feature of this dedication is an identification of the saint with the book containing her story, so that the Queen is told she will be able to « la recevoir comme une Soeur, qu'elle place dedans son cabinet, pour s'entretenir avec elle de toutes les merveilles de sa vie, & des souffrances étonnantes de son glorieux Martyre ». The exemplary role of both saint and Queen is underlined and the sun imagery associated with Louis XIV is extended to his wife:

... ainsi que le Soleil communique sa lumiere à tous les astres & flambeaux celestes, faisant éclater cette haute & profonde devotion qu'elle a pour son Createur, illumine tous ses sujets, & les enflamant du feu divin dont son coeur Royal est tout ardent, elle les excitent [sic] fortement à la suivre dans cette voye Sacrée des Vertus.

Moreover, in a somewhat shocking trope, it is anticipated that Maria Theresa will also be queen in heaven:

... regnant doublement sur ces bienheureux sujets, à sçavoir dans ce monde, & dans l'autre, où j'espere avec la grace de Dieu, de

vous voir d'autant plus élevée dans la gloire, qu'il a pleu à celui
qui dispose de tout, de vous avoir élevée en supériorité sur nous
dans cette vie.

And Le Grand concludes by maintaining that no one will dare persecute the
'Reine' he is placing under her protection.

My final religious play is Le Febvre's *Eugénie, ou le triomphe de la chasteté* (1678), dedicated to Madeleine Gabrielle Lallement, abbess of Nôtre-Dame d'Espagne¹⁶. Le Febvre praises the abbess for her intelligence and education but also her charity. This allows him to justify his audacity: although she is sure to see his play's faults, she will be charitable enough to excuse them. Above all, he lauds her skilful management of a religious house and her protection and education of her charges: « le grand soin que vous prenez pour le bon reglement de vôtre sainte maison, où vous élevez vos Religieuses dans la solide pieté, pour ensuite en peupler le Ciel ». The conceit here is that Eugenia has come as a novice to seek the abbess's protection: « Elle sçait que vous la traiterez avec la mesme douceur que vous traitez un bon nombre de saintes Vestales, qui s'estiment heureuses, & qui benissent Dieu tous les jours d'estre sous vôtre conduite ». Saint Eugenia was falsely accused of rape while disguised as a man; Le Febvre admits his own Eugenia may also have her critics, but hopes the abbess's name will protect her from censure. Then, in a final flourish, he brings his themes together:

Nôtre Eugenie a la devotion d'entrer chez vous; mais elle n'a pas
d'autre dotte, que la bonne volonté de celui qui vous la présente;
& comme il est trop persuadé que vous ne vous conduisez jamais
par l'interest, il espere aussi qu'elle trouvera quelque place dans
vôtre solitude, pour se mettre à l'abry de la médisance.

¹⁶ F. Le Febvre. *Eugénie, ou le triomphe de la chasteté*. Amiens: G. Le Bel, 1678.

Turning to secular plays, the first work in my corpus is Thomas Corneille's *Bérénice* (1659), dedicated to the comtesse de Noailles¹⁷. The comtesse was a celebrated *précieuse*, known for her love of the theatre and support of the Corneille brothers. Thomas acknowledges his debt: « Je ne pretens point m'acquiter de ce que je vous dois par le foible present que je me hazarde à vous faire », and boasts of having already received « des preuves sensibles » of her « bonté ». This dedication is an excellent example of a trope whereby the author pretends to restrain himself for fear of offending the lady's modesty: « Ne croyez pas, MADAME, que je sois assez temeraire pour songer icy à examiner toutes les belles qualitez qui vous rendent ce que vous estes ». And when he finds himself helplessly slipping into adoration, he forces himself to stop: « Mais, MADAME, je ne m'apperçois pas que je m'engage insensiblement à vous louer [...]. Il faut en arrester l'indiscretion & vous marquer mon respect par mon silence ».

Thomas comments on the comtesse's position at court (« le rang que vous tenez auprès de la plus Grande REYNE de la Terre »), where she is one of its chief « Ornemens ». However, she is not just beautiful and (he maintains) unaffected, but stands out by her combination of beauty and intelligence: « cette parfaite union qui se rencontre en vostre personne des graces du corps avec la force & la delicatesses de l'esprit, est une merveille qu'on a rarement sujet d'admirer ailleurs ». This is another trope that will reappear: several authors claim their dedicatees have the intelligence to value what others have failed to appreciate. Here, the comtesse is said to possess « un entier discernement », and Thomas claims he hesitated to present his play to her since she is sure to spot its defects, and especially anything « de languissant & de défectueux ». He is, however, aware of her « indulgence » and so concludes by maintaining that his

¹⁷ Thomas Corneille. *Bérénice*. Rouen: A. Courbé and G. de Luyne, 1659. Louise Boyer (1632-97), the daughter of a financier, had married Anne de Noailles in 1646. She was lady-in-waiting to Anne of Austria, the mother of Louis XIV, from 1657-1665 (Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*, II, 156, 358).

heroine « ne croit plus avoir rien à craindre de la censure du Public puisque vous entreprenez sa defence ».

Quinault's dedication of *La Mort de Cyrus* (1659) to Mme Fouquet follows an almost identical pattern¹⁸. This was the wife of Louis XIV's Minister of Finance who was then at the apogee of his power¹⁹. Like Thomas, Quinault claims he finds it shameful to offer her a work that is « mediocre », since her « discernement si juste » is bound to see its defects, but adds that if it could stand alone it would not need her protection. He reassures her that he does not intend to embarrass her by enumerating her many qualities, which are universally known, but cannot prevent himself from mentioning her beauty, which arouses envy in other women, though she sets little store by it. However, in Quinault's opinion, the true sign of her worth (and beauty) is her husband, whom he describes as « une Ame dont la force & la grandeur n'ont point de bornes », and an « illustre Protecteur des Muses », so that « l'on ne peut douter que vostre merite ne soit infiny, puisque vous meritez toute sa tendresse ». At this point Quinault catches himself up and excuses himself for praising her husband when he should only be speaking of her. He justifies this by claiming he could brag of « les marques effectives de la bonté genereuse dont il a daigné m'honorer », were he not fearful that « il ne me le pardonneroit jamais », while obviously doing precisely that. Quinault is, therefore, actually addressing Fouquet himself, using a supposed vow of secrecy as a pretext for the substitution of his wife, which might in fact be seen as another search for variety, given that three other tragedies were dedicated to Fouquet during the course of the same year²⁰.

¹⁸ Philippe Quinault. *La Mort de Cyrus*. Paris: Augustin Courbé and Guillaume de Luyne, 1659.

¹⁹ Marie-Madeleine de Castille-Villemereuil, the daughter of a wealthy financier, had become Fouquet's second wife in 1651, when she was fifteen and he was thirty-six. Fouquet was disgraced in 1661 and subsequently imprisoned.

²⁰ Boyer's *Clotilde*, Pierre Corneille's *Oedipe* and Thomas Corneille's *La Mort de l'empereur Commode*.

Another play dedicated to a wife is Venel's *Jephté* (1676) – unusually placed under the protection of the author's spouse. This was, though, no act of husbandly gallantry, since the dedication is purportedly the work of the editor, who claims to have « stolen » the play and published it without the author's knowledge²¹. Madeleine de Venel occupied an important place in the royal household as lady-in-waiting to the Queen and under-governess to the royal children, having previously been governess to Mazarin's nieces²². The conceit here is that *Jephté*'s daughter, Seïla, has come as a foreigner to seek the protection of the person to whom the greatest king in the world entrusts his children. Again the author praises the lady's virtues, while claiming to be incapable of doing them justice and fearing to injure her modesty.

Another governess, the duchesse de la Ferté, appears as the dedicatee of La Chappelle's *Téléphonte* (1683)²³. The author opens conventionally, deeming his work unworthy, but says he was encouraged by her applause. He is slightly more original when he claims to regret being unable to have his hero speak for him, but explains he was reluctant to cede the glory of praising her. He expresses his appreciation of her rank, grace, beauty, greatness of soul, generosity of spirit, vivacity, solid intelligence, good humour, kindness, and sincerity, all of which make her an ornament of the court. He attributes these qualities to the education she received from her mother, whose own worth was demonstrated by the fact that she also looked after the King's children²⁴. In sum, the duchesse is deemed to be « une des plus accomplies personnes de votre sexe ».

²¹ Venel. *Jephté ou la mort de Seïla, tragédie*. Paris: Charles Brebion, 1676.

²² Louis Mayeul Chaudon. *Nouveau Dictionnaire biographique*. 8 vols, Caen: G. Le Roy, 1786, VIII, 522.

²³ Jean de La Chappelle. *Téléphonte*. Paris: n. pub., 1683.

²⁴ Marie-Isabelle-Gabrielle-Angélique, the daughter of the maréchal de la Mothe-Houdancourt, married Henri-François de Senneterre, first marquis then duc de la Ferté in 1675. She died aged seventy-two in 1726. Her mother, Louise de Prie, the elder daughter of the marquis de Toussy and Françoise de Saint-Gelais de Lusignan, had married Philippe de la Motte-Houdancourt in 1650. Having been widowed in 1657, she became governess to Louis XIV's children in 1664,

These last three women occupied conventional female roles, whereas my next dedicatee exerted considerable political power in her own right. Magnon's *Zénobie* (1660) is dedicated to Christine de France, duchesse de Savoie, daughter of Henri IV and Louis XIII's sister, whom Magnon addresses as « très-haute et très puissante princesse »²⁵. According to Magnon, his heroine could boast of being incomparable among women were it not for the birth twelve hundred years later of Christine, who deserves praise on account of her connections and for her own sake: « vous seriez plus digne de commander à toutes les Nations par un merite qui vous est propre, que par des considerations naturelles ». He points out similarities between the two women: both were of royal blood, married kings and were widowed. But this has allowed them to demonstrate their « courage & [...] prudence », and the fact that « vostre Sexe est aussi capable que le nostre d'entreprendre hardiment & d'executer [...] glorieusement ». Both Zénobie and Christine defended their children's inheritance against enemy invaders. But a seventeenth-century queen could not make war herself, and Magnon is obliged to praise a male associate: the « incomparable » comte d'Harcourt, who served Christine « dignement » and was an « insigne Faiseur de miracles en matiere de victoires »²⁶. Magnon assures Christine that her birth, generosity, intelligence and prudence fit her to be mistress of the world and not just of Savoy, and consoles her with the thought that she was mistress of her husband's heart, which was greater than the world. He particularly praises her courage when confronted with the vicissitudes of fate, and, abandoning the usual similarities, notes that unlike

and later exercised the same function with regard to the children of the Dauphin and the duc de Bourgogne. She died aged eighty-five in 1709 (Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*, I, 128; V, 134.

²⁵ Magnon. *Zénobie, reine de Palmyre*. Paris: Christophle Journal, 1660.

²⁶ Following the death of her husband, Victor Amadeus, in 1637, Christine acted as Regent to her two infant sons, Francis Hyacinth (1632-1638) and then Charles Emmanuel (1634-1675). Her brother-in-law Thomas disputed the succession, but Christine was supported by France, and the comte d'Harcourt played a decisive part in the military campaigns (1639-42) waged against him.

Zenobia she was successful in preserving her states and passing them on to her son.

In dedicating his *Astrate* (1665) to the Queen, Quinault informs Her Majesty that his hero has decided to present himself to her because she liked him in performance and he cannot bring himself to seek another protector²⁷. He opens by praising her rank, her husband (« [le] Monarque le plus renommé qui fut jamais ») and her son (« sa Vivante Image »), before correcting himself: « Mais, MADAME, pour sçavoir qu'il n'y a rien dans la Nature de plus accompli, ny de plus éclatant que VOSTRE MAJESTE, il n'est pas besoin que de tourner les yeux sur ELLE-MESME, & que d'envisager son propre Merite ». The Queen is described as « un Bien & un Ornement tout ensemble, pour ce Royaume », and one that it had nearly lost (she had been seriously ill following the birth of her daughter in 1664). The public's response is powerfully underlined: « Tant de larmes répanduës, tant de cris redoublez ». Quinault mentions that *Astrate* did not show himself while her life was in danger (possibly due to an interruption in performances), but has been rewarded for his temporary exile by the honour of being one of the first to entertain her after her convalescence²⁸. And the dedication ends on a semi-humorous note: all *Astrate* requires to be entirely happy is for « celui qui a pris soin de le faire revivre avec tant de succez » (namely Quinault) to share in his good fortune.

While Quinault speaks on behalf of *Astrate*, Genest in his dedication of *Zélonide* (1682) to the duchesse de Nevers has his heroine address the dedicatee herself to request asylum²⁹. She points out the similarities between the duchesse and Spartan women like herself, observing that the women of the French court are

²⁷ Philippe Quinault. *Astrate*. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1980.

²⁸ The play was finally given at court in the Queen's room on 6 January 1665 (William Brooks. *Philippe Quinault, Dramatist*. Oxford-Bern-Berlin-Brussels-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Wien: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 295-300).

²⁹ Genest. *Zélonide, princesse de Sparte*. Paris: Claude Barbin, 1682. Diane-Gabrielle Damas de Thiange married Philippe-Jullien (ou Jules)-François Mazzarini-Mancini, duc de Nivernais et de Donzinois in 1670. She died aged fifty-nine in 1715 (Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*, X, 147.

equal to any in Greece. As usual, the duchesse's charms, grace and modesty are praised, as is her « raison ». Her travels in Italy are noted, where she is said to have shown herself Spartan in her lack of weakness and timidity, while remaining superior to the women of that race in her retention of « douceur » and « bienséance ».

Sometimes several plays are dedicated to a single person, enabling us to compare the attributes credited to them. In the late 1660s, Henriette d'Angleterre, the sister-in-law of Louis XIV and sister of Charles II of England received two tragedies: Racine's *Andromaque* (1668) and Boyer's *Fête de Vénus* (1669). In his dedication, Racine admits to using Henriette's name to dazzle his readers, but also boasts of the princess's participation in his tragedy's composition³⁰. Not only did she deign to « prendre soin de la conduite », she also bestowed « quelques-unes de [ses] lumières pour y ajouter de nouveaux ornements ». Indeed, the tears she shed at an early reading console him for fact that others have not liked it. But he credits Henriette with intelligence as well as sensibility, saying that she knows as much about history and dramaturgy as any playwright, and is better than his sex in terms of intellect, while still possessing all the graces of hers. And he concludes by recommending that all those who work to satisfy the public look to her as an arbiter of taste and strive to please her.

Boyer opens his own dedication to the princess with apparent self-deprecation: he was afraid his boldness might cause Fortune to trick him since « [elle] n'est pas de mes amyes »³¹. However, the approbation his work has received has proved his fears unfounded. He plays upon the identification of the princess with the Goddess of Love, but is on dangerous ground and so emphasises that he means « Venus Uranie », « cette Venus toute pure & toute celeste », whom he believes to be the « Venus veritable », as opposed to the passionate, unfaithful, vindictive,

³⁰ Jean Racine, *Andromaque*, in *Oeuvres complètes, I, Théâtre-Poésie*, dir. Georges Forestier. Paris, Gallimard, 1999 p. 193-256.

³¹ Claude Boyer. *La Fête de Vénus*. Paris: Gabriel Quinet, 1669.

and, therefore, false Venus of « la fable ». He rhapsodises on Henriette's charm and grace (a somewhat backhanded compliment since this is deemed to be « plus belle & plus conquérante que la beauté mesme »), as well as her wit (« ce tour fin & delicat que vous donnez à toutes choses »), which causes her to be viewed as « une des premieres intelligences du monde gallant & spiritual ».

Two women each had four tragedies dedicated to them: the duchesse de Bouillon in the 1670s and 1680s and the Dauphine in the 1680s and 1690s³². Marie Anne Mancini, duchesse de Bouillon was one of Mazarin's five nieces, who had married Maurice Godefroy de la Tour d'Auvergne, nephew of the celebrated general Turenne in 1662³³. She was a well-known *salonnière*, who took a lively interest in literary matters and reputedly took Pradon's part against Racine in the « querelle des deux *Phèdre* »³⁴. It is no surprise, therefore, to see the former's effort amongst those tragedies dedicated to her. The duchesse's interest in theatre is immediately apparent from Abeille's dedication to *Argélie* (1674), where he thanks her for her support and boasts of the applause and tears with which she honoured his play³⁵. He offers it to her as a sign of thanks and to ensure it will be approved of by « tout le Monde ».

Pradon, in his dedication to *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677), refers to another of her pastimes when, asking her to permit Hippolyte to emerge from his forest to salute her, he remarks that she is probably a better hunter than his hero. Again we find praise of the dedicatee's charms and intelligence, and her ability to appreciate the beauties of Horace and Ovid is particularly noted. Pointedly, given the circumstances surrounding the rival production of the two *Phèdres*, the duchesse is said never to judge by « cabale » but only by « discernement ». Nevertheless, Pradon concludes by saying that Hippolyte wishes to thank her for the « bontez »

³² This can be compared to the four dedicated to Fouquet; no other man, including the King, Monsieur and Colbert, received more than two.

³³ Saint-Simon. *Mémoires*, I, 111. The duchesse died aged sixty-four in 1714.

³⁴ See Georges Forestier. *Jean Racine*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, pp. 549-65.

³⁵ Abeille. *Argélie, reine de Thessalie*. Paris: Claude Barbin, 1674.

she showed him when he appeared on the stage, in the hope that they might be continued now that he is on paper.

Boyer's *Agamemnon* first appeared in 1680 under the pseudonym of Pader d'Assezan; the dedication is signed with this name and the play is referred to by the supposed author as his « prémices ». It was not, in fact, until three years later (in a subsequent dedication) that Boyer claimed the work as his own³⁶. The author of the *Agamemnon* dedication emphasises the link between his play and its hero: just as the latter survived a war only to succumb in the bosom of his family, so his published play, which had been successful onstage, might fall before the critics' onslaught. He hopes, though, that the duchesse's protection, rank and rare qualities will silence them. He notes her support for literature and « les sciences », repeats Pradon's praise of her knowledge of Greek and Latin authors, acknowledges that she has acted as a « Mécène » to him in the past, and vows to continue to serve her

In his dedication to *Cléopâtre* (1682), La Chappelle, like so many others, tells the duchesse he does not intend to praise her before expressing his astonishment at her intelligence and learning, which are « au dessus de vostre sexe »³⁷. He, too, notes that she did not consider his play unworthy of attention, accorded it a « bon accueil », and shed the inevitable tears when she saw it performed, which is what has encouraged him to declare his obligation to her. Finally, Campistron addresses his *Arminius* (1685) to her in a dedication that has the novelty of being entirely in verse³⁸. He has been flattered by her support and claims to have been inspired by her « noble house », taking Mazarin as the model for his politician, Turenne for his military hero, and, of course, the duchesse herself for his princess.

My final series of plays are all dedicated to the Dauphine: La Tuillerie's *Hercule* (1682), Campistron's *Andronic* (1685) and *Alcibiade* (1686), and

³⁶ Claude Boyer. *Artaxerce, tragédie*. Paris: C. Blageart, 1683.

³⁷ Jean de La Chappelle. *Cléopâtre*. Paris: Jean Ribou, 1682.

³⁸ Campistron. *Arminius*. Paris: n. pub., 1685.

Pradon's *Régulus* (1688)³⁹. The choice of dedicatee for the last three was judicious. In 1684, the King gave control of the Paris theatres to his daughter-in-law, who exercised her authority by means of a thorough shake up, taking on new actors, dismissing those who displeased her and personally allocating roles⁴⁰. In his dedication to *Hercule*, La Tuillerie reports that she attended a performance and was not displeased, and hopes she will similarly enjoy reading it⁴¹. But above all, he expresses his joy at the announcement of her pregnancy, which promises « des Héros à la France, des fils au plus charmant Prince de la Terre, & des Neveux au plus grand Roy qui fut jamais »⁴². Campistron goes further, stating that *Andronic* owes its entire success to the Dauphine's approbation and the tears it caused her to shed⁴³. He refers perhaps to the new theatrical status quo when he maintains that all tragic authors are overjoyed to see her moved by their works, hails her as a model princess and says he would be happy to one day create a heroine like her. However, his second dedication to the Dauphine (itself a rarity) contains little innovation. The only original touch occurs when he claims not to be using her name to add brilliance to his work or to boast that she applauded (while, of course, doing precisely those things). Her control of the theatres is, though, perhaps alluded to when he writes that « vostre jugement fait aujourd'huy la destinée de toutes les Pieces », and the usual professed reluctance to praise is again justified by the assertion that the « tendresse » of her husband and the « estime » of « [le] plus grand des Roys » are the only eulogy she requires.

Finally, Pradon hopes *Régulus* will appear to advantage on paper having enjoyed success on stage, and expects he will appeal to someone « dont les

³⁹ Marie-Anne Christine Victoire de Bavière had arrived in France to marry the Dauphin in 1680.

⁴⁰ See William D. Howarth. *French Theatre in the Neo-Classical Era, 1550-1789*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 290-95.

⁴¹ La Tuillerie. *Hercule*. Paris: Jean Ribou, 1682.

⁴² The duc de Bourgogne was born on 6 August 1682.

⁴³ Campistron. *Andronic*. Paris: Thomas Guillain, 1685.

sentiments sont si grands & si nobles »⁴⁴. He also refers to the Dauphine's predilection for tragedy:

... c'est à vous à qui la Tragedie doit uniquement ses beautez; c'est par le goust exquis que vous en avez, par ces lumieres penetrantes à qui rien n'échape, que vous animez encore ceux qui sont capables de faire ces sortes d'Ouvrages, à en produire de nouveaux.

And he concludes by vowing to redouble his efforts to make himself still more worthy of applause.

So, what conclusions can we draw? We have seen the various strategies employed by the authors to vary the form of these dedications, which include treating their heroes as if they are real people and even, on one occasion, having them address the dedicatee themselves. We have seen the importance attached to (feigned) modesty — of the author categorising his work as unworthy while paradoxically recalling its success, or of the dedicatee who will be embarrassed by excessive praise. But praise there is in abundance, both of the body and, perhaps more importantly, of the mind, said to have been shaped by both private study and education — vital when the dedicatee is supposedly being asked to judge in literary and artistic matters. Above all, we see the importance attached to many of these women as sources of patronage and protection, whether due to their personal qualities, their interests, or their place in society, culminating in the series of dedications to the Dauphine, who is unusual in that she exerted actual authority in the domain in which the authors of these dedications were operating.

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⁴⁴ Jacques Pradon. *Regulus*. Paris: Thomas Guillain, 1688.